

errors have crept in, to be sure, but remarkably few for a work so difficult to compile and to edit. And these errors, it should be noted, are being corrected in the supplements as soon as they are noted.

No major changes have been made in the content of the list itself, except, of course, for the sizable increase in new headings which have been introduced since the publication of the fourth edition. This expansion is particularly noticeable in headings relating to music and to the late war and reconstruction. Essentially the same headings are excluded as in previous editions. No attempt is made here to evaluate the adequacy or inadequacy of the headings themselves, for these are relative terms for each library, depending upon its collections and its clientele. It is apparent both from the fifth edition itself and the supplements which have been issued to it that constant effort is being directed toward modernizing terminology and revising all subject headings in the light of a changing world and the books it produces.

There are, of course, minor defects. In all copies thus far seen by this reviewer, it is evident that the binding is not sturdy enough for a book so bulky and subject to such intensive use as this one. It is regrettable that the binding could not have achieved the same standard of excellence as the list itself and

the paper on which it is printed. Apparently the editors have not hesitated on occasion to make changes in subject entries as listed in the fifth edition without having noted them in one of the supplements. Fortunately, these changes have been minor in nature and not too numerous, but their introduction without warning imposes a greater burden on those catalogers who attempt conformity to Library of Congress usage in the interest of economy. One wonders too why the editor did not consider incorporating the list of subdivisions (*Subject Subdivisions*, 6th ed. 1924) now somewhat out of date in a 1936 reprint either into the basic list where appropriate annotations could distinguish subdivision forms, or at least in a supplementary section in the same volume.

But these are relatively minor matters. The fifth edition of this standard subject heading list marks an important step in its evolution. Of all the editions to date, this is the best designed for efficient use. Librarians everywhere owe a debt of gratitude to the editor and her staff whose patience and care have produced so excellent a product and to the Library of Congress which once again has evidenced its intent of providing maximum assistance at minimum cost to libraries the nation over.—*Carlyle J. Frarey, College of the City of New York Library.*

## Philosophy of Literature

*Philosophy of Literature.* By Gustav E. Mueller. New York, Philosophical Library, [1948], 226p. \$3.50.

The Philosophical Library has done a useful service in making available a goodly number of summarizing or surveying volumes. It has also tended to publish under similar titles volumes that are in fact eccentric or specialized pleas, so that its imprint does not certify the book to be of one scholarly class, and its titles may be misleading. The present book by Professor Mueller is of the second class. Its simple title, *Philosophy of Literature*, lacking even a definite article, suggests a sober and inclusive general position. Instead, we have a relativistic attempt to demonstrate a cyclical, sociological development of the creative imagination. "The chosen poets from Homer to Dostoevsky are beacons illu-

minating the rhythmic 'up' and 'down' of the Western civilization during the last three thousand years." It is difficult to believe that such a theory can define the true greatness of these poets, however useful the sociological study of the cultural background of literature may sometimes prove.

Such a book may well serve some purpose in the world of specialized philosophers. But although its title would seem to recommend it to the undergraduate's general shelf, I fear it will have little usefulness there. Much of the writing seems to be addressed to undergraduates (elementary explanations without footnotes of the facts of Dante's life, elementary definitions of words like "plot" and "content," and oversimplified assertions that "the Renaissance is a transition and a compromise between a religious and a secular

age"); but most undergraduates will be either repelled or confused by the uneven emphases of this book.

This is not to say that Professor Mueller makes no useful comments on his chosen authors. Many a paragraph represents an interesting and stimulating point of view. But too many of them seem to me to be obvious truisms, cloudy generalizations, or forced and untenable interpretations or assertions. "Troy everlastingly stands for endangered homelands. Homer's poetic humanity bestows equal sympathy on friends and foes." (p. 8); "The Renaissance throws itself with a mystic ecstasy to the bosom of nature." (p. 125); "The concept of tragedy is an unpleasant aesthetic concept, because it defies explanation." (p. 116). These are average samples of the three types.

Furthermore, the treatment is too slight

and eccentric to satisfy the student of any one of these authors. The sixth chapter, on Hamlet, Erasmus, Montaigne, and Rabelais as illustrations of the Renaissance, allots three brief pages to a perfunctory summary of two conventional attitudes toward Hamlet; four pages to the author's hurried exposition of his own belief that the play includes Hamlet's normative tendency to purify or correct "together with the obstreperous and obstructive blindness of irrational nature"; and two paragraphs to the other three authors.

The style is somewhat awkward at times, possibly from the translation of phrases first conceived in German. The volume, though attractive, is carelessly printed, or proofed, so that there are too many annoying small errors. —Allen T. Hazen, *School of Library Service, Columbia University.*

## Fore-Edge Paintings

*A Thousand and One Fore-Edge Paintings, with Notes on the Artists, Bookbinders, Publishers and other Men and Women Connected with the History of a Curious Art.* By Carl J. Weber. Waterville, Colby College Press, 1949. (Colby College monograph no. 16). xvi, 194p. \$7.50.

Here is the first book to be published on fore-edge paintings, although the "curious art" itself is not new. Born in the seventeenth century, it grew strong in the eighteenth, reached its height early in the nineteenth and lingers on, mainly as a hobby, even today. An English invention, and practiced most extensively and successfully in England, one wonders why the book-minded British have neglected to tell the world about such a fascinating aspect of bookmaking. We can be grateful to Professor Weber for filling this gap with a delightful account that is a pleasing mixture of about three parts literary lore with one part book history, thus reflecting his dual position—professor of English literature and curator of rare books and manuscripts in Colby College.

Professor Weber's study is based on examination of hundreds of volumes whose edges bear paintings. His curiosity was aroused by the few examples of the art in the Colby College Library, and by the dearth of literature on the subject. He found the

largest single collection of all in the volumes assembled by Mrs. Edward L. Doheny in the Doheny Memorial Library at St. John's Seminary in California. The "Thousand and One" of the book's title refers to the number of fore-edge paintings listed in an appendix. These are located in more than 50 collections, public and private.

The author, in explaining his subject, says that many people do not know what fore-edge paintings are, even those "who have known and handled books all their lives." Fore-edge paintings are paintings on the fore-edge of a book. If the paintings are executed on the panel which the closed book offers, then we are dealing with a practice which goes back to at least as early as the tenth century, when edges were decorated with designs stamped into the gilt with a hot tool. But it is not this obvious kind of fore-edge decoration with which this book is concerned. Far more provocative is the result obtained by opening the book, fanning the leaves, painting a design on this larger surface and then gilding over the paintings. When the book is closed the painting disappears and the edges appear merely gilt. No wonder this is called a "mysterious art." Occasionally an ambitious artist, after painting the edges when the leaves were fanned from the front, would fan the leaves the opposite way and execute